

Dear friends,

As the following news report indicates, industrial relations in the church of England are deadlocked.



As the server's strike entered its third week, the army was called in

But seriously, two days could hardly have seen more different weather as Saturday and Sunday. On Saturday we tried a walk in the Blackdown hills we had done before, before cold, rain and fog led us to abandon it. Sunday was beautiful of course. The day was enhanced for me because when we arrived at St. Michael's church the bells were ringing, which I had never heard before. Apparently, they will attempt to ring them every other week and then to see if it can't be done permanently! That - along with the sunshine lifted all our moods.

Note: I will be on holiday for two weeks so there will be no email for a while and my last service in the RMC before I depart will be the Ash Wednesday service at 9.30am at St. Peter's. Imposition of ashes will be offered (though not obligatory of course). I don't know how it affects other people but when I say the words "From dust you came and to dust you shall return" it sends a shiver down my spine.

Sunday 26th February – 1st of Lent

Archdeacon Trevor Jones will preside at both services at St. Peter's, Rev. Margaret Scrivener will preside at All Saints at 9.30 and Rev. Jean Burrows will preside at St. Michael's at 11am.

Genesis 2: 15-16, 3:1-7. On the face of it, God lies, and the serpent tells the truth – they didn't die. But in this passage, apparently full of puns and double entendres in the Hebrew (lost on English speakers) something deeper is going on. Would it be better to have everlasting life without knowledge of good and evil or a limited life with that knowledge? When they eat the forbidden fruit they have their eyes opened, and although they are "like" God in knowing good and evil, that doesn't mean that human beings are good at coping with it. And of course, if you are not going to live forever that raises the issue of sex and procreation which is the connection with the last verse. Because of the plusses and minuses of the two states of being, this story has sometimes been characterised as a "fall upwards" and a necessary developmental leap for humankind.

Romans 5: 12-19. Adam and Jesus are both figures whose actions affect all of humanity. The effects are universal. Through the disobedience of Adam, sin and death entered all humanity but the obedience of Jesus leads to righteousness and eternal life for all. Whilst Paul elsewhere will draw a distinction between those who are being saved and those who are perishing, here the theological logic of his argument leads only one way.

Matthew 4: 1-11. "Forty days and forty nights" are a Hebrew idiom meant to declare the divine nature of what was occurring. Most probably here the parallel is with the forty years in the wilderness the Jewish people were tested by God. Jesus obviously spent time after his baptism where he heard the words "You are my beloved Son" in contemplation of what those words meant and, in our tradition, being tempted to betray the will of God. But Jesus withstood all those temptations to betray God on behalf of the humanity He came to save.

Lent course

There will be a four session Lent course starting in March, not always on the same night every week – a mixture of Tuesdays and Wednesdays. The course is based on Richard Rohr's book "The Universal Christ". Fr. Richard comes from a radical Mystical and contemplative school of catholic theology in the same vein and stable as Julian of Norwich, William Blake and Thomas Merton and while you don't need to have necessarily read the book, it would give a solid background to the course and is £9.55 for a paperback copy or under a Fiver for a Kindle version. The dates are as follows.

Lent Course. – The Universal Christ Everything is sacred

4 session course. All sessions start at 7pm.

Tuesday 14th March – The four worldviews

Wednesday 22nd March – Spiritual transformation.

Tuesday 28th March – Christ is everywhere

Wednesday 5th April – Contemplation

A Spring Concert – 25th march at 6.30pm

In St. Peter's church with the Exeter Temple Salvation army band and Songsters. Tickets are £8 in advance from the "card shop too" in Budleigh High street or on the door. It promises to be a wonderful evening!

Thought for the day

"From dust you came and to dust you shall return, turn away from sin and be faithful to Christ". The dust applied to the forehead at this point is supposed to make you aware of your mortality and your total reliance on God for your creation, preservation, and redemption. It is, therefore, the biggest blow to your ego that you could possibly take. When it comes to life itself, we have absolutely no control and if there's one thing that modern people like to have more than anything else it is control.

When rights, freedoms, and agency is removed from us as they were during the Pandemic this can give us all a foretaste of what powerlessness feels like in the face of forces beyond our control.

The tens of thousands who have lost their lives in southern Turkey and Syria show that some situations are too big to be dealt with by either individuals or states, for apart from recriminations over building regulations in Turkey, it reveals our absolute powerlessness. And so, paradoxically to many people (especially Western secularists), this can lead those who escaped the carnage to a greater reliance on God not less.

For when you really think about it, when an atheist removes God from the world, you still have earthquakes, volcanos, war, suffering and death, but by removing God what you have really removed is any kind of hope.

The Prayer for Today

God of mercy,
We pray for the people of Türkiye and Syria
following the recent earthquakes.
We mourn the death and destruction.
and pray for those who have died and those who grieve.

Lord, bring them comfort, strength and renewed hope.

We hold in our hearts those who are injured,
and those who have lost loved ones, livelihoods, and homes.

Lord, bring them comfort, strength and renewed hope.

Sustain and guide all responding to this disaster.
Grant those affected courage and resilience,
as they rebuild their lives and communities.

Lord, bring them comfort, strength and renewed hope.

Inspire us to unite in solidarity,
acting swiftly and generously,
so that help may reach all who need it.
Lord, bring them comfort, strength and renewed hope.

Love and peace,
Martin